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ABSTRACT

The relationship between statewide boards of education and their constituents is considered. It is suggested that boards of education and college trustees have had little basis for a working relationship, and that colleges have felt suspicion or invasion of turf in respect to statewide boards. One hindrance is that college trustees have been entrusted with responsibilities for higher education but most of them are laypersons who have not been professionally prepared and carefully selected for their tasks. In addition, college presidents, who are the principal resource for college trustees, are not trained to prepare them. It is further suggested that college presidents are not motivated to train trustees, and that when it comes to being made aware of the real issues in higher education, the college trustee is usually the last to know. One of the things that trustees and statewide boards have in common is that both groups are almost universally disliked. Statewide boards may take positive steps by informing trustees of the board's goals. Trustees can help the situation in higher education by taking an active role in influencing colleges and universities toward programs of interinstitutional cooperation, through the statewide boards. (SW)

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HOW MIGHT STATEWIDE BOARDS CONTINUE TO ENHANCE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR CONSTITUENTS?

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HOW MIGHT STATEWIDE BOARDS CONTINUE
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I have had one or more affiliations with higher education over the past 44 years. I have been -- and I name the categories in descending order of prestige -- student, faculty member, administrator, college trustee, and chairman of the board. In the last five capacities, I have made 717 speeches, and on each such occasion I have been able, somewhat conscientiously and almost irrespective of the magnitude or complexity of the issue under discussion, to inject at the very least a note of hope. Here today, among this disparate band of state legislators, educators and chief executives and members of statewide coordinating and governing boards -- here in this oasis of debauchery with the outrageous and audacious name of Shangri-la -- I find little basis for continuing my tradition of optimism.

Be aware: today I elect to speak to the question before us from the perspective of a trustee on an individual college caught in that great and allegedly insidious web woven by a statewide board -- a web which it feels is suddenly, cruelly and insensitively imposed upon it.

In the first place, from such perspective, the very topic for this session, put in the form of a question, presents problems of form and of meaning. It reads, ponderously, "How might statewide boards continue to enhance relationships with their constituents?" It is an unforgivably leading question because it assumes that statewide boards have indeed even <u>commenced</u> to enhance it. And worse still, it assumes that the relationship is susceptible to enhancement. And, if I am typical of <u>most</u> (but not all) trustees, I resent the form of the question, especially since I have probably never seen a single one among you -- you the statewide board chief executive or any of your own state board trustees or regents -- on my campus, or a single one of you at my board meetings, nor has any among you even once sought out my opinion on an issue.

Given that as the typical, although not unanimous, attitude -- and you would be sadly deceived not to know that it is -- any expectation of enhancing the relationship between us seems futile. This is especially true when we focus on the meaning of enhance. It means literally "to exalt in rank and spirit." Considering the way that the typical me feels about the typical you, our relationship is hardly likely to be subject to exaltation.

A further problem with the topic is that -- as to statewide boards -- it refers to your "constituents." Since the nature of your mission relates to every person within your jurisdiction who is in any way, manner or fashion associated with or affected by higher education within that jurisdiction, your constituents constitute every citizen in your respective states, and the thought of doing anything with a constituency of that universal a nature -- even aside from enhancing relationships -- is ludicrous. So I make a second election. I elect to regard the term "constituents," for my part of the discussion, to refer to the colleges within your geographical area.

So here we are, a statewide board and a college trustee staring at each other at high noon. And the situation is very tense.

I suppose that any rational approach to a solution must start with a recognition of truth. But that would be too direct, so for diversion let us commence with an almost truth. The almost truth is that we are enemies as natural as the chicken and the fox. If you attempt to woo us (staying with an animalistic metaphor that is certain to offend you), the best result that you could ever expect to achieve would be akin to the mating of two magnificent and hairy tarantulas. We might go through the process, but be assured that we would approach each other very carefully and with never-ending suspicion.

Why do we feel this way about each other? Well, the concept of turf is one reason. The simple fact is that we got there before you did. There were more than 2,000 of us colleges almost before any one of you even existed, and even by 1959, when there were about 3,000 of us colleges, there were only 20 of you. And going through all 3,000 institutional minds is the gnawing question of why, when we were supposedly doing so fine a job without you, do we need you, another intermeddling bureaucracy.

But turf is only one reason. The other should be written in capital letters or stated in stentorian tones. The other reason is that you can accomplish what you want to accomplish only through us trustees, that the minds of most trustees of most colleges are simply too undeveloped even to accept your efforts, not to mention appreciating them, and that you have precious little good access to us.

Let us embellish that theme a bit, since it involves some interesting ironies, and it will help you understand something of the secret life of a college trustee.

The first irony requires a realization on your part of the staggering challenge that is foisted upon the rounded and arthritic shoulders of the 40,000 of us who today comprise the corps of college/university trustees here in America. For one of the most important aspects and functions of our society--<u>the</u> most important after survival, and perhaps more important than <u>mere</u> survival--the education of our people, is entrusted in significant part to the stewardship of laymen: to me and my trustee colleagues. Imagine! We trustees are, in the final analysis, legally, morally, procedurally and substantively answerable for leadership in helping to maintain the cultural level of a nation. And yet ironically, whereas every other participant in the higher education process--our presidents, and our deans, and our administrators, and our faculty, and our support and maintenance staffs--are professionally prepared and carefully selected for their respective tasks, we, the final burden bearers, are a potpourri of different, unlikely and shocking origins. At one end of the spectrum we are charter members of old boy clubs; at the other end, we are political appointees of the lowest order (and I happen to be in the latter category). And once we are finally so selected, we are prepared--if one can use the phrase--for our ordeal by receiving primarily on-the-job training. Considering this, if we do fulfill our responsibilities with even C minus competence, the achievement is miraculous.

So the first irony is we trustees. The presupposition that because we are elected, appointed or proclaimed to be trustees we therefore know what trustees are supposed to know, and that we know how to do what trustees are supposed to do, is so frivolous as to be amusing.

The second irony does not lag far behind. It lies in the fact that--by default, if for no other reason--the presidents of our colleges are the principal resource for preparing us for our purpose, yet they themselves are not trained to train us! Further, it is hardly ever expected of them. I have been involved recently in consulting with boards of trustees on matters of presidential selection (some seem to trust a colleague over an expert). Not a single proposed job description--until I had a whack at it--included as a responsibility of the chief executive that of educating his board to its duties, or of reminding his trustees that there are areas of knowledge, a global perception of education, that they must have before they can begin to perform those duties effectively. If they, our chief executives, do not tell us what we must really know and how we must go about acquiring the knowledge, how else, except for an AGB, are we to learn? And cooperative efforts are not high on their list of priorities.

And quickly we come to the third irony. It originates with the unfortunate and probably accurate presupposition that the more we trustees know, the more we are likely to use the knowledge in our own officious intermeddling in the affairs of the college which our administrators would like to preempt as their own. I do not deny this. So assuming that they, our presidents, are trained to train us, there must be a serious question in their minds as to whether or not they should even do so. The process is, after all, enervating for them: many of us are slow to learn, to them it is an impediment to getting things done, but more importantly it involves that dangerous possibility of making us a bit too perceptive, a bit too critical, a bit too effective, a bit too aware of the global nature of our task.

We trustees are told, of course, that we have <u>the</u> big responsibility--that of setting policy. But with no small encouragements from our chief executives, we have let it fall into the context of our adopting an occasional regulation or routine body of regulations on miscellaneous matters relating to the governance of the college. Our president tells us that it is time for a document respecting tenure. We therefore adopt a tenure policy, usually devised, designed or plagiarized by our administrators, and we do it on most occasions without any adequate fresh inquiry into the basic rationale for it, or the full ranging effect of it upon our own college. Or our president says that it is time for a document regarding grievances. We therefore adopt a grievance policy, so devised, designed or plagiarized and also, perhaps, without such fresh inquiry.

This, of course, is not policy as we should conceive it, and we are too easily led to believe that this is the sole level of policy which is our concern. The meaning of policy which we must insist upon is that meaning which evolves from its classical origin, the word which related to the city-state as the epitome of the enlightened community. Here, in this context, we speak of policy as it refers to the art and science of government, as it refers to prudence and wisdom in the management of public affairs, as it refers to a projected program consisting of desired objectives and the planned means to achieve them. With this meaning are we growing closer to you? When it comes to being made aware of the real issues in higher education, the college trustee, like the cuckolded husband, is usually the last to know.

So obviously you are dealing with undeveloped minds, and we grope for hope. Is there any? Of course there is.

For that which is undeveloped usually hides a fresh fertility. And so it is with the minds of us trustees (if not their bodies); and if you can admit to the problem, we can advance to planning the solution. And indeed the aspects are favorable for us.

Firstly, the environment is right. Because while the almost truth is that we are natural enemies, the real truth is that we are natural friends. We are creatures of a common habitat, the jungle of higher education. Secondly, we have a common concern--we are both almost universally disliked: boards of trustees by administrators, faculties, students and support staffs; and statewide boards by everybody. Thirdly, we have a common objective, although some of us trustees have to be helped or pushed across the threshold of awareness to realize it. It will not be easy, but it is possible.

Truth cannot be repressed for long, but you must play a significant role in the disclosure. Notwithstanding what you are now doing in some states, you must strategize to achieve even better access to us. You must see that we are more specifically informed of the realities of what you are trying to achieve, and by some even more intense personal diplomacy disabuse us of all fears. We are ready to be told, if only you can find a way to bring it to our boardroom tables with more frequency, that our responsiblities are bidimensional; that we are trustees not only of our respective colleges, but of higher education generally. Our presidents are hesitant to tell us this, nor does our current reward system motivate them to do so. We are more receptive now to the idea that we are a pluralistic group and that we must believe in pluralism in education because it is the strength of our society. We must be made to acknowledge that it is fortunate that we vary from the indiscriminate wide-open door institution to the elitist institution, with all of the variations in between, because together we add to the marvelous texture of our civilization. We must be made to realize that each of us represents a different tone on the educational spectrum; and if one such tone disappears we are all, in consequence, impoverished. And any one of us could at any time cease to function because of the grievous effects of unrestrained competition and insensitivity to our commonality of purpose.

We trustees are neglecting our duties unless we are taking an active, affirmative role in influencing our colleges and universities toward programs of inter-institutional cooperation, through our statewide boards. We are ready to understand that, if you are prepared to tell us that, we must preserve by joint action our differences and disparities--whether in size, sponsorship, scope of program or relative prestige, real or imagined. We are now ready to accept as truth that we cannot exist in an education community composed only of financially successful competitors. It is increasingly clear that only by cooperative efforts can these desirable differences be preserved, and cooperative efforts can be assured, in turn, only if a policy is developed and then effectuated. Autonomy and cooperation are not mutually exclusive; but too few of us, I feel, are made to realize it. I hope you will carry this message to us repeatedly, consistently, persistently, in a nonapologetic way, directly, indirectly, through trustee associations and through individual trustee boards

Are there barriers to the achievement of all of this? Most certainly. Typically, the lead article of a recent issue of a publication of the Association of Community College Trustees, written, of course, by a board chairman, starts out with a skewed somewhat unintelligible, but challenging paragraph saying:

> Our educational community no longer seems to be a single unit because outside agencies have created a hierarchy through legislation, education code, mandates, and directives. This has separated even us into five distinct groups where self-preservation has become each group's individual goal. These five are students, board of trustees, administrators, certified personnel (teachers), and classified personnel.

Once you figure out the meaning, I advise you to get to that group. I myself, today, seek some absolution by confession; our own AGB publication makes very careful note of the fact that one of the 12 areas of responsibility of trustees is to preserve institutional independence, and by strong implication warns us against you. We are correcting that now. We are advocating and promoting, with Dr. Rabineau and ECS (Education Commission of the States), regional meetings of college trustees and statewide boards, and we expect to do much more about it in the future.

But you set your own barriers, too. I have carefully studied the 20 page policy statement which ECS proposed last week in Atlanta. Not one sentence is directed to the matter of trustees or boards of trustees of your constituents. Even when it examines the important issue of program review, it states that the criteria for same should be liberally understood by "administrators, faculty and other interested parties." Right? Wrong! The most important target group for such understanding must be we trustees. Only through us can there by the exaltation in rank and spirit. And if we so understand, you shall see how very much easier your task will be. We can then face our total responsibilities to our total communities; and we can eschew provincialism. My hero, Pericles, knowing that I was going to address you today, sent a message which he asked that I pass on to you. It seems so appropriate. He said:

> Remind them of the oath of the citizen of the great city state of Athens. Remind them especially of the part that goes: "I declare that our community shall be an education to the world; I declare that I shall ever strive for the ideals and sacred things of the community--both alone and with the many."